

Public Comments
Submitted on Proposed St. John Land Exchange
July 2023

Good Day Senator Francis,

I was born and have lived my whole life on St. John. For 7th and 8th grades I commuted to school on St. Thomas (1964-65). I remember that it was extremely tiring and made for very long school days. I therefore understand what St. John children today have to go through to attend school on St. Thomas.

I am 100% supportive of the proposed land swap with the National Park Service of land at Catherineberg in exchange for the offshore cay of Whistling Cay for the construction of a school (1-12 grades) on St. John. I actually feel that the VIG is getting the better deal with the Catherineberg property as Whistling Cay has very rugged topography, unsuited for any development and is an important nesting site for our Brown Pelicans. In fact, it is highly probable that almost everyone thought this cay was already part of the National Park prior to this proposal becoming public. And the Park had restored the old Danish guard house there a number of years ago, further fostering this belief.

So, I urge you to support this land swap for the betterment of St. John and our children. We will all thank you.

Respectfully,
Ralf (Rafe) Boulon

Rafe Boulon
340.690.5588

The government of the VI should not swap land with National Park. The National Park should simply give land to build a school on St John without hesitation or compensation.

Melissa Parry Murraine

I, Alfred Petersen, am hereby requesting 200,000,000,000,000 times by saying NO TO THE SWAP of Whistling Cay 17.9 acres for exchange for 8 acres of #6 Catherineberg, St. John.

I am requesting 200,000,000,000,000 times by saying NO TO THE SWAP of Whistling Cay 17.9 acres for exchange for 11 acres of #6 Catherineberg, St. John.

obo
Alfred Petersen

Good day, Sen. Francis

I am not in favor of the land swap for the landing, Cathrine Berg for Whistling cay. This is not right at all and not fair! How much more will they take from the VI people?

Sincerely
Joseph Williams

Good afternoon- as a resident of St. John for over 20 some years - I just want to write and give my support for the land swap for a new St. John school. It is time. I think if this swap doesn't happen now- it will never occur. We've looked at all the possible locations over how many years? There will always be opposition- St. John needs a new school and we need to get our town back to the way it was before the hurricane. How long are we going to have "temporary classrooms" in the middle of town? We deserve more than this.....The swap is a fair trade. Who is using or visiting Whistling Cay now? No one. If the Government owns it - what changes? Nothing. You can still go visit the old custom house. This resistance to this swap is ridiculous. St. John needs to move forward. This school is not only important to our future generations but is also the first step in improving our much loved town of Cruz Bay.....thank you for your time

Mark Lonski PROPERTYKING, inc.
340-643-6348
pkingusvi@gmail.com

I am fully in favor of this land swap.

I have sailed, swam, and fished by this small island since i was born. It sits as a landmark. No one uses it, and it has no value to the VI Gov. To swap this for a valuable piece of usable land to build a school for the youth of St. John is a perfect win-win for both parties. The Park will care for, maintain, and police this small island for us, still giving everyone access, but without the burden of doing the work. It is a no-brainer. PLEASE approve it.

Regards,
Peter

Peter Holmberg
6501 Red Hook Plaza, Ste 201-898
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, 00802
340.244.3394

Dear Senator,

As a 38 year full time resident of St John , I am in favor of the land swap. The money to support the build won't be available indefinitely and the kids have had NO ballfield since Irma. The temporary units have been in place too long and Cruz Bay is no longer a safe location for the school.

I strongly believe that those who are against the swap are actually against the wealthy who have bought up a lot of land and raised property taxes. The NPS is not the problem.

Thank you for having St John students as your priority.

Sincerely,

Lani Clark

As a resident of St John for over 15 years, I encourage you to support the land swap. Children & parents have waited way too long for this to become a reality.

Thank you.

Michael Krienik
71-10 Skytop Road
Fish Bay, St John

I am a resident of St John. I believe the education of our children is more important than some cay that most people have never visited.

I support the land swap with the NPS.

Joan Wilson
10-8-17 Carolina, St. John

Good Morning Senator,

I am resident of St. John. I am reluctantly submitting to the approval of the land swap because I feel like we will not get any other choice because nothing else has been thoroughly explored. I too wish an act of congress allowed for the park to give something back that in a lot of cases they obtained illegally. I would like to see STJ kids be able to go to high school on island for free. We have let our youth down repeatedly for years. They deserve better. My high schooler has a 12 hour day during school and that doesn't leave much energy for anything else like homework, part time job, or sports.

On a separate note, I want to see STJ as part of it's own district. We have needs that are unique to our island and we should not be lumped in with STT. It is very often that the STJ resources are used on STT.

Thank you,

Julie King

Dear Senate President Francis,

Thank you for soliciting input from the community about the land swap. I am in absolute agreement with moving forward with the construction of a new school on St. John and believe the land swap is the most expedient and best way to make that happen in my life time. I don't know who moves slower, FEMA or the National Park Service, but the proposed land swap is the quickest way to get a new school constructed.

I understand that some St. Johians disagree with the concept of giving up land but the National Park Service has no legal authority to donate land. Federal law prohibits conveyance of property from National Parks.

I would like to attend the public hearing on Tuesday but am in Florida receiving cancer treatment that is not available because radiation treatment is still not available since the storms. There is great expense to living off island and perhaps the government could help reimburse those of us who can't receive treatment at home. Thank you.

Beverly Lockett, 340-244-7923

Greetings Senator Francis,

Happy Friday and Happy July 3rd Emancipation Observances.

I am writing to share my thoughts on the land swap and the building of a public high school on St. John.

As one who had to commute to St. Thomas to attend high school, I know firsthand what this feels like. It feels horrible. It feels as though no one cares. For many St. John students, this is how they feel too. As the program manager for the Department of Education's emotional wellness through the Insular Superintendent's office at the Julius E. Sprauve School, I have found that the promotional class of 2023 who will begin high school on St. Thomas is apprehensive about having to leave their home island to another island to be educated.

The land swap need not be another roadblock to this goal of giving St. Johnian children the right to an equitable education as their peers on St. Thomas and St. Croix. The people of St. John and these Virgin Islands should not have to bargain with the colonialist powers for land that were already supposed to be for a public high school to be now put in a war for or against a land swap. The congress lady should be fighting for these islands, instead, she is or has been courting Jeffery Epstein and his illegal human trafficking of children. This egregious history of politics in the Virgin Islands must come to an end to save our children on St. John from a lack of human services, library services, high school services, and the list goes on and on.

I am not for or against any land swap. I am for a public high school in St. John and that should mean not having to give up something to get something when the people of St. John have already given up so much. Now it is time for swift action. This means that the Governor down to the legislature needs to fight for what the people want!

Thank you for your time.

Blessed thanks,

Carla M. Sewer, Ph.D., CFLE (#1186251), Librarian

[Dr. Sewer's Business Website](#)

[Dr. Sewer's Home Page](#)

Business Email: drclamssewer@neguseducation.com

Dear Senate President Francis,

Thank you for taking the time to read this e-mail.

We are in complete opposition to the proposed land swap to facilitate the construction of a school or any structure, of any type, on the land parcel known as Catherineberg Estate on the island of St John in the Virgin Islands.

The Bishop family made it very clear, when they deeded to the National Park the parcel targeted for development, that NO development of ANY kind would EVER take place on the donated land. In a parallel case, the government is hinging its claim to control the disposition of the Caneel Bay property on a desire to honor the written directions of Laurance Rockefeller when the Caneel land he donated reverts to the Virgin Islands National Park this September 30th.

The government cannot have it both ways; the government points to the written directions of Rockefeller in its claim for control of Caneel as of September 30th yet turns a blind eye to the written directions of the Bishops and "interprets" their desires to suit the government. This is bold hypocrisy, inequity, bias and discrimination.

The notion that the land to be acquired through the swap represents a "fair trade" is disingenuous. The Whistling Cay parcel, literally a small island, is in no danger of ever being developed. It is so remote and difficult to access that it represents no practical attraction for physical visits and its currently unspoiled splendor is protected by the very nature of its remoteness and difficulty in access. Its value is mainly in the beauty of its unspoiled natural state (acknowledging the presence of the man-made ruin), the same as the Catherineberg parcel, and stands to gain no real further protection from development by being designated a national park.

Additionally, the Catherineberg parcel is ill-suited for the planned development! I have driven past the parcel hundreds of times, noting on dozens of occasions the slope of the land and the massive excavation that would be required to truly level a portion of land that will still only partially satisfy the building requirements; the facility physically cannot fit on the parcel! I invite you to visit the site and spend some time surveying it. You will quickly and undoubtedly reach the same conclusion; the parcel is not suited to the proposed project.

There are many, much better suited areas on the island that need to be more seriously considered. Perhaps the expansive flat areas of Caneel Bay, which the government claims it will control in just a few months, is better suited. Caneel has MORE than enough flat land for the proposed campus, would offer direct ferry access for those students targeted to commute from St Thomas, and still leave many acres for park lands and beaches as well as the potential for a new resort, should that be part of the government's goals.

We also have a very personal interest and financial stake in this issue. We own property that immediately abuts the proposed building site parcel. A major reason why we purchased the property was the protection from development afforded the neighboring lands by virtue of their status as national park territory.

One of the universally recognized top attractions to the island of St John is the expansive undeveloped, undisturbed national park land. These lands have been donated to and/or designated as national park land with the understanding that they would remain in their natural state and be protected from development in perpetuity. Island residents and visitors alike have been attracted to

this island in large part due to the beauty and tranquility afforded by the parklands.

Altering any parcel of national park land, for any reason, even one as worthy and noble as a new school campus, is a violation of the sacred trust and intent of the national park compact and the protected status of these lands. Once a violation/alteration is allowed for any reason, the door will have been opened for further exceptions to potentially follow. The protections are either absolute or they are not, there is no "in-between".

Aside from the personal potential negative financial impact we would surely suffer from development of land neighboring our property, the greater island stands to suffer serious deleterious consequences to the tranquility of the inner sanctum along Centerline Road. Construction traffic and noise, while temporary, will permeate the area for an extended period of time and traffic congestion and road noise will be a permanent feature as students, faculty, workers and supplies are transported to and from the campus throughout the year.

We purchased our house at a value significantly determined by its tranquil setting and location, knowing said tranquility was protected by the park status of the neighboring land. Changing that status is a violation of park protection practice and history and must not be allowed. Doing so would open ALL lands neighboring park land to the threat of "one-time, special exception" development and, again, must not be allowed.

One of us personally commuted to and from school for one hour each way as a child and teenager, from 1st grade through senior year of high school. While riding a ferry across a channel was not part of that commute, it was via public transportation and did not result in any ill effects. The claim that the proposed school will eliminate the ferry commute is only partially true, as it only applies to high school students residing on St John. Ironically, it has been proposed that excess classroom capacity in the proposed new facility be filled by students commuting from St Thomas to attend the new school! This makes absolutely no sense; justify, in part, the construction of the school by claiming it will eliminate the commute for one set of students while, at the same time, promoting the opportunity for an opposite-direction commute for another set of students!

We are in full support of improving the conditions of the current physical campus, either through refurbishment of existing structures or construction of new facilities on land that is not part of the national park. One of us is a career elementary school teacher. We both understand the need for a vibrant and robust learning environment. That environment must not be created through the compromise of the island's protected natural environment.

We have been regular visitors to St John for more than 25 years and admirers of its beauty, charm and tranquility. Now that we own property on the island, we are literally invested in wanting to maintain for future generations that which drew us and kept us returning to the island.

Leave both places in their current states. The protections afforded the Catherineberg parcel must not be compromised. The Whistling Cay parcel is protected by virtue of its remote location and will not practically benefit by being designated national park land.

Sincerely yours,
Thomas J and Brenda L Kalfas

Dear Senate President Francis,

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The Bishop family made it very clear, when they deeded to the National Park the parcel targeted for development, that NO development of ANY kind would EVER take place on the donated land. In a parallel case, the government is hinging its claim to control the disposition of the Caneel Bay property on a desire to honor the written directions of Laurance Rockefeller when the Caneel land he donated reverts to the Virgin Islands National Park this September 30th.

The government cannot have it both ways; the government points to the written directions of Rockefeller in its claim for control of Caneel as of September 30th yet turns a blind eye to the written directions of the Bishops and "interprets" their desires to suit the government. This is bold hypocrisy, inequity, bias and discrimination.

The notion that the land to be acquired through the swap represents a "fair trade" is disingenuous. The Whistling Cay parcel, literally a small island, is in no danger of ever being developed. It is so remote and difficult to access that it represents no practical attraction for physical visits and its currently unspoiled splendor is protected by the very nature of its remoteness and difficulty in access. Its value is mainly in the beauty of its unspoiled natural state (acknowledging the presence of the man-made ruin), the same as the Catherineberg parcel, and stands to gain no real further protection from development by being designated a national park.

There are many, much better suited areas on the island that need to be more seriously considered. Perhaps the expansive flat areas of Caneel Bay, which the government claims it will control in just a few months, is better suited. Caneel has MORE than enough flat land for the proposed campus, would offer direct ferry access for those students targeted to commute from St Thomas, and still leave many acres for park lands and beaches as well as the potential for a new resort, should that be part of the government's goals.

I implore you to leave both places in their current states. The protections afforded the Catherineberg parcel must not be compromised. The Whistling Cay parcel is protected by virtue of its remote location and will not practically benefit by being designated national park land.

Kind Regards,

Jim Leslie
717-810-6769

1/7/23

Attention : Senate President Novelle E. Francis, Jr.

Thank you for holding this hearing on a potential land swap with the Federal Government involving land on St. John. As deliberations are had please consider the following:

4 POINTS TO BE ADDRESSED IN ANY USVI LAND SWAP AGREEMENT WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

1. The USVI should secure a percentage of "future discovery interest" such that benefits are shared between the Federal Government and the USVI regarding items found in lands that were formerly USVI property.
2. The present status of water accessibility as per the water way should remain open as it is currently.
3. The "Preserved area" of 3 acres should be utilized for teaching our cultural heritage via outdoor classrooms.
4. The nearby Sugar Mill is not being maintained/preserved to the degree that the "Preserved area" is being required to be preserved; the discrepancy needs to be addressed. The level/ degree of "preservation" should not be higher for the USVI than the threshold maintained by the Federal Government.

Sincerely,

Alvis Christian SR 1

Alvis Christian SR

A Testimony to Stop the Exchange of Whistling Key to the National Park Service

By Leba Ola-Niyi, St. Thomas, V.I.

I, Leba Ola-Niyi, oppose the land swap or exchange of Whistling Cay, a key that belongs to the people of the Virgin Islands, to the National Park Service (NPS), a federal entity that manages 60 percent of our sister islands as US national park. This park belongs to the people of the United States! Having around two-thirds of an island as a park, catering to the visitor, is an obstacle for the social and economic development of the people of St. John. I oppose any proposal or legislation that will exchange Whistling Key (Tract No. 02-101) for an 11-acre parcel at Catheringberg for the construction of Pre-K-12 public school. It is an unfair deal. In other words, the Cay is a 17.97-acre island off Mary Point on the north side of St. John, and this property is worth about \$1,440,00.00. But the parcel at Estate Catherineburg is only appraised at \$1,230,000.00 and is 8-acre less than Whistling Cay.

As a native, lifelong resident, concerned citizen, and community activist, I have deep roots and family ties to John Folly and Carol Bay. As a US colonial territory, that is not an integral part of the United States of America, I am letting you know my position and opposition to privatization, federalization, and gentrification of our “commons” that include our islands, cays, seas, beaches, cultural traditions, and other essentials of life and society.

I support plans, proposals, projects, and policies that will elevate the people of the Virgin Islands. I strongly agree and support the construction of a new public school for our children and youth in St. John. The school should be built on land offered and exchanged from landowners in lieu of collective or personal property obligations. Why are the governor, congressional delegate, and NPS officials are refusing to comply and fulfill the aspirations of the people of the Virgin Islands? In 1979, the V.I. Legislature passed Resolution 974, initiated by then At-Large Senator Cleone Creque to address and resolve the land question in St. John. In 2023, the Concerned People of the Virgin Islands, St. John Chapter initiated a petition drive to stop the swap of Whistling Key to the National Park Service. Hence, I have supported and signed that petition. With determination, I prefer and support the following suggestions or solutions as alternative options to the land swap.:

1. Urge the 35th V.I. Legislature to oppose and reject the current proposal, agreement, and legislation for the land swap as the only option.
2. Urge the governor to reconsider and negotiate other options with local landowners who are willing to exchange parcels for property obligations and sustainable development such as schools, housing, hospital, agriculture, and culture.
3. Urge the congressional delegate to initiate congressional legislations that would limit NPS expansion, reduce the NPS acres or boundaries, set legal mechanisms and options for the Interior Department to transfer federal land to the local government for the sole purposes of sustainable development in the islands.
4. Urge the Government of the Virgin Islands (GVI) to place and protect the common goods such as keys, public spaces, historic landmarks and other areas of particular concerns under the VI Territorial Park.

In closing, I am strongly opposed to a land swap between GVI and NPS. I prefer land exchange between GVI and local landowners for the construction of the Pre-K-12 public school in St. John. We must protect, preserve, and expand the “commons” for the use and development of the present and future generations.

Good day Senator Gittens,

Thank you for reaching out for public comments regarding the proposed land swap for a St. John K-12 school. I write to you as a 25+ year resident and voter in the USVI, initially St. Thomas and now St. John. I've worked in architecture the whole time, working with Jaredian Design Group on the rebuilds of BCB and Peace Corps Schools after hurricane Marilyn, and now with Barefoot Design Group, working with Giffit Hill School on their master planning and expansions, among hundreds of other projects. I am also bringing up my small family here, with two children born and raised on the island of St. John.

While I do agree St. John needs a high school, **I strongly oppose the proposed location in Hammer's Farm, for many many reasons.**

First, from my extensive experience in construction of schools and site master planning, 10 acres of flat land is nowhere near what is required to build a functional K-12 public school for hundreds of students... and this land is not flat. As identified in last year's planning exercises with a professional school planning design firm from the states, the top third of the Catherineberg parcel in question is seen as too steep to be functionally useful for school construction, and I agree. In addition, the seasonal gut through the middle of the property reduced the usable acreage, as did cordoned-off areas for historic ruins and the small cemetery. We may really be dealing with 7 or 8 acres of buildable space, and even half of that starts to get steep enough to be challenging to design and build large structures on.

To add to the site-specific problems, there are no public services to the site aside from power - so the large-scale systems like septic treatment; water collection, storage, heating, and distribution; LP gas storage and distribution; trash storage and removal; backup power generation would all have to be handled on-site, and most of these needs will compete with all the other demands for the lowest-elevation, easiest-access, and severely limited flat land along the bottom of the property. **The planning exercise already gave up on a field or any other exterior play areas or courts [! - no sports teams, no outdoor rec, no swings for the 5 year-olds?],** but beyond all those basic system needs, there would still be the requirement for parking, bathrooms, auditorium, gym, elevators and stairs [the grade change is 100+ feet, 10 stories, from the road to the top of the useable site,] offices, cafeteria, at least a dozen classrooms plus specials [art, music, etc?] - you can flex-space around some of this, but there's no getting around the need for both the 2nd graders and the 11th graders needing lunch at some point around lunchtime or for every teacher and admin needing a parking spot.

Fitting in all the program requirements for a functional K-12 school on this property is a ridiculous task for the VIG to even consider as an option.

Secondly, **the VIG has many other better options for this school construction.** For an easy solution, the current JESS/annex property in Cruz Bay and some of the surrounding VIG-owned land could easily convert to a functional downtown **middle and high school.** This property has flat space for sports, is close to SPR, STJ School of the Arts, tennis courts, Pan Dragons, fields, and public services like ferries, emergency response, and septic systems. It would be a walkable location for many Cruz Bay based students, as well as staff coming from St. Thomas, and there's less concern about little children crossing busy Cruz Bay streets if this school is just for the older students. **The Guy Benjamin School in Coral Bay could be the elementary school only** - before the storms, this school was moving in a very positive direction, with lots of excitement, lots of parental involvement, and improving numbers. The DoE complains about the difficulty in operating two schools with parallel administration staffing, but some personnel could easily be shared between the two campuses, it's literally just 8 miles away, and the schools would benefit from utilizing St. John based administrators and teachers. Also, it's not a good move to mix first graders and eleventh graders on one small

campus, splitting the schools is logistically far smarter. As another clean option, the VIG also owns the mid-island acreage where the clinic is, which is already organized with the large-scale off-grid systems and parking, is mostly-flat, and could be augmented with adjacent leased lands for large flat fields and play yards. There's also the option to finally foreclose on a decades-old tax lien that has been threatened forever, on 170 acres in Coral Bay, half of which is flat and an incredibly easy build. Politically - it's a bad move for someone seeking reelection, but it's kind of hard to promise "education first!" on the campaign flyers but then spend four years sitting on the solution for the sake of a few votes.

I know it's a small point, but **morally, the construction of a school at Hammers Farm spits in the face of a deceased widow's wishes for her legacy.** When the property was transferred from Bishop to the VI National Park decades ago, the deed included a long list of restrictions. It is crystal clear from the restrictions placed on the property - no uses other than residential, no change in the topography [no digging!], no construction of buildings aside from replacement of the small houses that were already on the property, even as specific as no cutting of trees or brush - that Mrs. Bishop was mandating that this property was to be used for natural preservation ONLY. I thought, and it's clear Mrs. Bishop thought, [and reinforced with the deed restrictions] that this property would, forever, be preservation land, green space. Beyond her life, beyond our lives, beyond our children's children's lives. If someone had a different preference - for a horse sanctuary or for a school or for an auto racetrack, they'd likely donate land to those causes instead, also expecting them to stay within the confines of the strict restrictions.

Lastly, I see the land swap as legally questionable. Title 31 of the VI Code forbids conveyance of shoreline property by the VIG, as the framers of the government understood that publicly-owned waterfront property was a limited asset. The language is crystal clear, "*No portion of a "shoreline" as defined in section 402 of chapter 10 of Title 12 of this code, shall be sold, leased or otherwise disposed of by the Government of the Virgin Islands.*" As the lawmakers, you could obviously propose a bill to repeal this verbiage and make the swap work, but I feel this move would be shortsighted and not in the best interest of the next generations of Virgin Islanders.

I thank you for your time and attention,
Theodore Chouiniere, St. John

July 6, 2023

TESTIMONY

RE: Land Exchange Between the National Park Service and the Government of the Virgin Islands

Honorable Novelle E. Francis, President, Thirty-Fifth Legislature of the Virgin Islands; other Honorable Senators of this august body, listening and viewing audiences', ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. I am Yvonne Wells, mother of the Commissioner of Education, Dionne Wells-Hedrington. I am speaking as a former educator and proponent for public education and **not** as Commissioner Wells-Hedrington's mother.

Thanks very much for granting me this opportunity to address you regarding the Proposed Bill for the Land Swap between the Government of the V. I. and the National Park Service.

Let me begin by stating that public education for the people of St. John has been challenging over the last 70 years plus/minus and beyond. During my mother's growing up on this island, few youngsters were educated beyond the 6th grade. The more affluent residents: though few, were able to send their children to Antigua to advance their education. Children walked for miles to get to school. If you wanted your child to get a high school education, you had to pay for room and board in private homes for your child to get to go to high school. Before the inception of the Julius E. Sprauve School, children had to commute to CAHS from grade 8. Then as time moved on Sprauve School went to the 9th grade, making the transition to St. Thomas for high school more palpable. However, our children were always at a disadvantage in being able to participate in extracurricular activities. Transportation was a major factor and the further out you lived the more difficulty was experienced. Julius Sprauve School is in the heart of Cruz Bay with all the commercial activity and surrounded by bars and restaurants.

In recent years those who live in the East End/John's Folly/Mandahl/Coral Bay communities have had to be up and get ready to meet the bus at 6 a.m. Returning home close to 6 pm; easy 12-hour days. All this with no ability to participate in extra curricula activities and little time to study before having to get ready for the next day and its ordeal.

If my mind serves me correctly, plans for a comprehensive educational complex were worked on during the Turnbull Administration, when Mr. Gaylord Sprauve was Superintendent of schools and Mr. Julien Harley was administrator. The vision was similar. Catherineberg was the proposed sight, and the National Park was not in agreement. However, the current plan is much more comprehensive.

Nothing should come between our children and their education. But like everything else, there is good and bad in everything. The National Park has brought great recognition to St. John, worldwide. It has helped in the preservation of our beaches and historical sights. Most, if not all the land owned by the park slipped through the hands of our elders directly or indirectly. It's just what it is; **reality!** However, its

unconscionable to now be faced with the reality that the Park, having such an abundance of land, is by no means willing to give land back to the community for building a school. What's the word? **They are not in the business of doing that!**

Building a school should be our number one priority. Ideally, it would have been great for the Park Service to gift the Catherineberg Estate to the local government, free of encumbrances, in lieu of swapping Whistling Cay.

I agree with the statement in the draft bill in reference to the student involvement. Those of us who are believers continue to affirm that all things work together for the good of those who believe and as such, we look for good in every situation. Irma and caused major devastation in our islands. The good that came out of the situation has been the opportunity for us here in the territory to get the needed funding to replace and renovate our existing outdated facilities to adequately provide the learning environments needed for our children to become equal to others throughout the United States. We have the opportunity of a lifetime!

I have heard it said that we don't have the numbers to warrant a high school, I beg to differ. We need to plan with vision for future growth. In addition, it is past time that St. Thomas-St. John being a district, operate in like manner, not only when it's convenient for some. Schools in this district should offer all the disciplines/career paths and students should be able to attend where their interests are i.e., sciences, technology, fine arts, vocational etc. St. John **MUST** have its own public school. Many private schools just cater to the brightest and the best. Students with special needs are not desired by their standards. No school on St. John should be allowed to take on the education of the masses.

I have heard is said, 'Make Giffit Hill School, the high school. Make it the Charter School for St. John. I vehemently oppose that idea! No Way! Private schools can operate on St. John, however, we need Government-run public school on St. John.

Many are up in arms regarding the swap of Whistling Cay for the Catherineberg site because the park should not own any more property. I get it! But, if all aspects were explored and there is no other way, we cannot continue to deny our children the future construction of a 21st Century facility for a school. Our children should not be made pawns in this equation. The irony about it all is that we were in a deep sleep and a quake jolted us. So, suddenly, we jumped up and realized that we needed to save Whistling Cay, no more land for the park.

A major concern I had with the swap was ownership of the waters surrounding Whistling Cay. I dreaded the park's usual restrictions relative to the surrounding waters that they control. Having heard that the park is ready to turn over the water ways surrounding the island, I was relieved because I was concerned about guaranteeing the local fishermen access to continue fishing in and around the area. In my estimation, that was a major win in the proposal.

Legislators, we need to put aside our own picayune differences. In my humble estimation, it appears that the Honorable Governor, Albert Bryan in his eagerness to get things moving, may have by-passed your body and went ahead and established

parameters on behalf of the community. Granted he may have overstepped his boundary, I implore you to put aside the politics, chastise him for his atrocity if you must, but do not let it cause us to lose sight of our need to begin the process to get a well needed school for the children of St. John. **TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE!**

Thanks for your indulgence,

Yvonne Wells

Yvonne Wells
Retired Educator

David Marsh Written Testimony

My name is David Calvert Marsh, and I am a resident of St. John. I am here to speak in support of the land swap between the Virgin Islands Government and the Virgin Islands National Park Service (VINPS).

In my day-to-day conversation with other residents of St. John, I am quite aware of how some may feel about the Virgin Islands National Park Service. While I feel their sentiments, I explain that this is not about VINPS but more so about the current and future generations of St. Johnians. St. John is losing its local people for several reasons, and one of those reasons is education. Many have relocated their children to avoid the hardship of receiving a high school education here in St. John.

For the first time in my life, a K-12 school seems like a reality on St. John. This was just a talk when I was about to begin high school. I remember telling my dad, "You and Mommy need to send me away for high school because I ain't doing that boat thing every day." I remember my dad offering me two options; (1) live with family on St. Thomas and go to CAHS and come home on weekends, or (2) attend high school in North Carolina. With both options, the common denominator was that I would be without my parents. So, I chose to go to school in North Carolina. I sometimes feel that I was cheated out of growing up here and experiencing high school in my own community when I sit and listen to my Guy Benjamin and JESS classmates talk about high school life.

As a bus driver on St. John, I am witnessing firsthand what our children must endure to receive public education. I would be remiss if I did not mention that Salt Pond was the furthest pick-up point at 5:45 AM during the school year 21-22. For the school year 2022-2023, my furthest point for pick up in the morning was at Miss Lucy's at 5:55 AM. That is probably when high schoolers on St. Thomas and St. Croix just got out of bed. If the school bus is picking up at 5:55 AM, those children may wake up at 4:45 AM. Because I understand how difficult it may be for them to wake up so early in the morning, I bend the bus company's rules and allow eating on the bus. The children have said that they are trying their best to get as much sleep as possible, so most times, they don't have an opportunity to eat at home.

In closing, I would just like to say that I understand and sympathize with all who are experiencing issues with the VINP, whether it is because they don't have access to their land or any other issues. Please don't use that issue as a reason to go against the

land swap. I implore you to think about what we could possibly be giving up because of personal issues with the park. Denying this land swap will not give access to your land, but it will keep our future generation of St. Johnians behind and without a K-12 public school, something we have been hoping for most of our lives.

Good morning,

Honorable Senate president Novel Francis Jr, Honorable Senators of the 34th legislature, People of the VI.

My name is Clarence Stephenson a St John Resident. I stand here annoyed and perturbed This morning we are debating a potential land swap between GVI and the NPS. A swap that would ultimately lead to a k-12 school finally being built on the island of St John.

As a little boy growing up, I heard the story about Mr. Rockefeller donating land to NPS with a provision that if the people of St John ever needed land for a hospital or school that the NPS would give the land back to the people of St John. Back then Mr. Rockefeller probably had a verbal agreement with the park because in those times your word was your bond. But now we live in a world where if it is not written it did not happen. So, the idea that the park would just give us the land was never an option during these negotiations.

This morning I have friends on the opposite side of this debate. And while I personally feel the park should in good faith give us the land what is the alternative? No School?

Then we have some people who oppose every that comes to this body for St John! People who oppose for no other reason than to be opposition. People who would not know where whistling cay was if not for google maps. People who say that they are for the kids until it is time to be for the kids. I am annoyed with them.

I pick my battles based on what is ultimately best for the community. Example. After the storms in 2017 there was a petition going around to halt the assembly of the modulars on the Winston Wells ballfield. After I refused to sign the petition. A friend of mine said to me so you going to just let them destroy the field that is named in honor of your uncle? And I said to him that if my uncle was here and had to choose between occasional softball games and the children of St john education he would put the children education first.

Senators when you vote later, I want you to picture a student waking up at 530 in Estate Adrian and its raining cats and dogs. This student puts on their school cloths and rain coat and walks 5 minutes to the bus stop. The bus arrives at 615 and transports the student to the ferry dock where the student now has to walk through the rain again this time to board the 7am school ferry. While on the ferry the rain continues but now add in the fact the wind is high and the sea is rough. After the 15-minute boat ride this student has to now walk to the prestigious Ivanna Eudora Kean Highschool again in the rain to start the school day. And after a full day of learning this student now has to repeat this cycle in reverse at 3 pm. This was my story I was that student in 1989. Now imagine those that live in Calabash Boom. The New School Construction Advisory board has included the public every step of the way. They have the standards in place, the money available and just need this land swap to start building this much needed school for the children of St John. Thank you for your time.

Clarence Stephenson

July 7, 2023

Dear Senator Francis,

Thank you for taking the time to listen to and include all the differing opinions regarding the proposed land swap on St. John. I will keep this brief as I know I am not alone in wanting to share my thoughts.

As a retired educator, who worked both in the public and private sectors on St. John for nearly forty years, I am strongly in favor of moving forward with the proposed land swap for a new school for our children on St. John. Our children deserve no less than a state of the art facility as well as a field and ample space to exercise their minds as well as their bodies. While the modular units were necessary and welcomed after the onslaught of the hurricanes, it is time move forward on behalf of our children. They and their teachers are to be commended for their patience and fortitude over the last few years enduring storms, covid and learning to navigate online educational platforms in less than ideal conditions.

I have tried to separate the needs of the children with issues involving the National Park and although I understand and respect the opinions of those who differ with mine, I think trying to work through this compromise together will help to unify this community. This is not a perfect solution but it is a way to move forward with this conversation about relocating the school, which has been ongoing since I taught at JESS in the 1970's. It is my understanding that attempts have been made over many years to secure land for this purpose, to no avail.

We are finally in sight of accomplishing this undertaking with a strong and skillful Commissioner of Education, set to take on this project and no doubt see it through to its completion.

Respectfully Submitted,
Beth H. Knight
Retired Educator